

# Position Statement of the Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society on Exurban Housing Development and Wildlife



**The Wildlife Society** – The Wildlife Society is an international organization of wildlife professionals established in 1937. Its principal objectives are: 1) develop and promote sound stewardship of wildlife resources and the environment upon which wildlife and humans depend using the best available science; 2) actively participate in programs designed to diminish human-induced environmental degradation; 3) increase awareness and appreciation of wildlife values; and 4) seek the highest standards in all activities of the wildlife profession. The Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society currently has 490 members active in research, management, education, and administration in the scientific management of Montana's wildlife and its habitat.

**Wildlife in Montana** – Montana is richly blessed in scenic splendor, abundant wildlife, and extensive undeveloped landscapes. Recognized across the nation and around the globe, Montana's wildlife is something we all treasure, enjoy, use, share, and zealously protect. Montanans have always been among the first to care for wildlife and the habitat on which it depends. Local sportsmen's clubs began organizing to restore wildlife and protect habitat in 1878; the first state game warden was hired in 1901; we protected grizzly bears in 1923, before anyone else; we began establishing game preserves nearly 100 years ago and acquiring state-owned game ranges, some of the first in the nation, nearly 75 years ago. We made sure we would have a clean and healthful environment by saying so in our State Constitution. Each generation in turn has done its part. We now enjoy the fruits of the often difficult and controversial labors of our visionary forebearers. In turn, the care of this precious resource now rests with us, to use, protect, enhance, and pass on to our children and their children.

In addition to its high inherent and aesthetic value, wildlife is vitally important to Montana's economy. Hunting, fishing and wildlife watching contributed about one billion dollars to Montana's economy in 2006<sup>1</sup>, putting it on a par with non-fuel minerals in 2007<sup>2</sup>, forest products in 2004<sup>3</sup>, and the sale of livestock in 2009<sup>4</sup>.

**Wildlife and Exurban Housing Development** – Within the last few decades a significant new threat to wildlife and wildlife habitat has emerged: exurban development – building houses and subdivisions in rural areas away from towns and out in the country where homes, roads, people, cars and pets affect wildlife far beyond their immediate locale and can fragment and greatly reduce functional wildlife habitat. Wildlife biologists across Montana have long recognized that exurban housing development is the primary threat to wildlife in western Montana<sup>5</sup>.

The rate that rural landscapes are being developed is staggering. Over forty million acres in the lower 48 states – one third of all the land ever developed there – has been developed in just the last 25 years<sup>6</sup>. During the same time western Montana saw three-quarters of a million acres of open space developed and another 325,000 acres converted from low density rural to exurban density housing<sup>7</sup>. Between 1970 and 2005 the year-round population of western Montana grew about 50 percent, yet the amount of developed land increased by almost 200 percent<sup>8</sup>.

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In view of the foregoing **It is the Position of The Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society** that:

**WHEREAS:** Exurban housing development is recognized as a serious threat to wildlife; and

**WHEREAS:** Exurban housing development can fragment large blocks of important intact undeveloped habitat; and

**WHEREAS:** The effect of exurban housing development may go miles beyond its immediate footprint on the landscape; and

**WHEREAS:** Scattered exurban development provides habitat and pathways for the expansion and proliferation of exotic non-desirable species like starlings, house sparrows, collared doves, etc., that can compete against and displace desirable native species; and

**WHEREAS:** Exurban housing development often puts humans in conflict with wildlife. People then see wildlife as "problem animals" rather than a valued natural resource. This reduces people's support for wildlife, habitat conservation and wildlife management programs; and

**WHEREAS:** Exurban development can make it difficult or impossible to manage certain wildlife populations, mainly because hunting with firearms and trapping as management tools are usually not options; and

**WHEREAS:** Exurban housing development often changes the natural habitat use and movements and connectivity for wildlife; and

**WHEREAS:** The cumulative effects of exurban development are seldom addressed in evaluating the effects of development on wildlife and wildlife habitat. This is not only true where there are additions to existing development, but more importantly, when new developments are proposed in undeveloped areas their effects are greater and they lead to future development; and

**WHEREAS:** Wildlife in the United States has always been and is now legally held in the public trust by government guided by the tenants of the Public Trust Doctrine. Federal, state, county and local governments are thereby the custodians of wildlife and are obligated to act responsibly for the benefit of present and future generations of all citizens.

**THEREFORE:** the Montana Chapter of the Wildlife Society supports and encourages:

**Long-range science based comprehensive land use planning** on an ecologically significant scale that recognizes wildlife and wildlife habitat as important resources to be conserved and enhanced, that identifies and protects important wildlife areas, and that also identifies areas more suitable for housing development.

**Adherence to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks' Recommendations** for Subdivision Development in Montana<sup>9</sup>.


**The provision of technical assistance** to local planning jurisdictions, working groups, and others engaged in the discussion of how local communities can avoid impacts and/or minimize impacts of development on important wildlife species and habitats.

**The additional collection and use of science- and ecology-based wildlife information and expert opinion** to better identify and mitigate impacts to wildlife and to prepare land use plans, update and implement land use regulations, and design better exurban developments.

**The evaluation of cumulative effects** during the review of proposed exurban housing developments. The additive or cumulative impacts of both current and future exurban development must be considered in future planning and development reviews and research. If cumulative effects are not considered then the true effects are not evaluated.

Adopted by The Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society Executive Board on December 7, 2012

Approved by vote of The Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society membership on February 28, 2013



President

Montana Chapter of the Wildlife Society

2/28/2013  
Date

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<sup>1</sup> USFWS. 2008. 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation

<sup>2</sup> USGS. 2010. 2007 Minerals Yearbook, The Mineral Industry of Montana.

<sup>3</sup> USDA Forest Service. 2008. Montana's forest products industry and timber harvest, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2011. Montana's Rank in the Nation's Agriculture Highlights.

<sup>5</sup> Vore, J. 2012. Big Game Winter Range Recommendations for Subdivision Development in Montana: Justifications and Rationale. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Professional Paper, January 9, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> USDA. 2009. Summary Report: 2007 National Resources Inventory.

<sup>7</sup> Sonoran Institute 2009. Western Montana: Growing Into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

<sup>8</sup> Sonoran Institute. 2009. Planning for People & Wildlife: A Workbook for Montana's Citizens and Local Officials.

<sup>9</sup> <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/livingWithWildlife/buildingWithWildlife/>